

Johnson's return-to-work speech: UK ruling class opts for mass murder

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson's announcement that government support for home working will end, public transport restrictions will be lifted, and sports stadium and other live events resumed, marks the end of any effective measures to suppress the coronavirus pandemic.

Johnson's homicidal plans, drawn up in consultation with officials from the Bank of England, reveal a financial oligarchy hell-bent on driving millions back to work no matter what the cost in human life.

His speech yesterday came just days after the Academy of Medical Scientists (AMS) published a 79-page report warning of up to 251,000 deaths by January-February 2021, unless the government took immediate mitigating action. The deaths would occur, "if there was a further relaxing of interventions, more contacts taking place, schools may be a factor, people going back to work and that sort of thing," AMS's Professor Azra Ghani said.

Sir Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientist, told a parliamentary select committee on Thursday there was "absolutely no reason" to change government advice urging people to work from home. He told the Commons Science and Technology Committee that the government's scientific advisory group for emergencies (SAGE) believed, "We're still at a time when distancing measures are important."

But Johnson made no reference to the dire warnings from epidemiologists and public health experts. In fact, it was revealed in Parliament Tuesday that this sociopath had not even bothered to read the scientists' report. Yesterday he merely stated, "It is possible that the virus will be more virulent in the winter months."

His speech was built on a pack of lies that the virus is under control. But all of the indices he cited—including a reduction in new infections, deaths and patients on mechanical ventilators—were achieved on the basis of a national lockdown which his government first opposed, then implemented too late, and is now ending against all scientific advice.

"As we plan for the worst, I strongly believe we should also hope for the best," Johnson declared.

His plans, including new powers for local government and a one-off increase to National Health Service (NHS) funding, will do nothing to avert a public health catastrophe in the weeks and months ahead. Just £3 billion has been pledged to the NHS (which has an annual operating budget of nearly £134 billion), with Johnson revealing much of this will be funnelled into "the independent sector," i.e., to further privatise the NHS.

The centrepiece of Johnson's speech was his reversal of government policy on working from home. "From 1 August, we will update our advice on going to work. Instead of government telling people to work from home, we are going to give employers more discretion, and ask them to make decisions about how their staff can work safely."

He continued, "As we reopen our society and economy, it's right that we give employers more discretion." His cynical advice that employers "should consult closely with their employees, and only ask people to return to their place of work if it is safe" will be used to coerce millions back to unsafe workplaces on threat of losing their jobs.

Johnson's announcement dovetails with the winding down of the furlough scheme, under which the government covered 80 percent of laid-off workers' wages. In August, the subsidy will be cut to 60 percent, with the scheme ending altogether on October 31. The government hopes it can kick-start the economy by stripping workers of all protection, as part of its profit-driven herd immunity strategy.

On August 1, bowling alleys, skating rinks, casinos, and beauty parlours will reopen along with indoor performances. Large "stadia events" will also be "piloted" next month, with the resumption in October of major sporting fixtures, live concerts, and business conferences.

This follows measures already announced, including the opening of retail and the hospitality sector and the full reopening of schools in September.

To facilitate this agenda, Johnson announced the scrapping of all restrictions on the use of public transport, "In England, from today we are making clear that anybody may use public transport with immediate effect." Buses, trains, light

rail and the London Underground will be transformed into major vectors for the spread of COVID-19 between cities, towns and villages, making a mockery of Johnson's focus on "targeted, local action" to beat the pandemic.

Finally, Johnson announced that the government's shielding programme for those most at risk from COVID-19 will be "paused" at the end of July. It is not yet clear what this will mean for those medically vulnerable workers who are currently on some form of sick pay.

On Thursday, the *Telegraph* revealed that Johnson's announcement followed an intervention by Bank of England (BoE) Governor Andrew Bailey who addressed the Tory party's backbench 1922 Committee Wednesday. Bailey set out a "three-point strategy" to reopen the economy.

The newspaper reported, "One Tory MP on the videoconference said the Governor spoke at length of his concerns that the 'fear of using public transport is really holding back the recovery because people aren't going into their office' and set out a 'three-point plan' of how he thinks this needs to be addressed.

"Another MP said it involved: 'One, trying to get people to overcome their caution and trying to get more people back on public transport. Two, unlocking all the restrictions as quickly as possible. And three, trying to boost productivity by getting people back to work'."

Bailey complained that train usage remained below 20 percent and was shocked to observe, during his morning drive to work, that London streets were so deserted. He railed against BoE employees and civil servants, demanding their return to work.

At yesterday's SAGE meeting neither Vallance nor the government's Chief Medical Officer, Sir Chris Whitty, were present. Johnson was joined instead by a woman he referred to only as "Dido." Diana Mary "Dido" is Baroness Harding of Winscombe, daughter of Lord Harding, granddaughter of Field Marshal John Harding, 1st Baron Harding of Petherton. She is married to John Penrose, Conservative Party MP for Weston-super-Mare. She was formerly CEO of TalkTalk, appointed a non-executive director on the Court of the Bank of England in 2014, and in 2017 became Head of NHS Improvement, a role devoted to the privatisation and break-up of the NHS. Harding later joined the board of the Jockey Club which oversees horseracing's most popular events, including the Cheltenham Festival. This fixture became a COVID-19 super-spreader in March when it went ahead, over the strenuous objections of scientists. Wikipedia notes, "In May 2020, Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced that Harding was to be put in charge of the 'Track, Test and Trace' effort as part of the UK government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Harding's presentation on the government's test and trace

efforts was a fabrication from beginning to end. Only last month, former Chief Scientific Adviser Sir David King, who now heads Independent SAGE, stated that "the system as it stands is not fit for purpose."

Johnson told the British people it was his "strong and sincere hope" for a "significant return to normality" from November at the earliest, "possibly in time for Christmas." His words recall the promises made by Europe's governments in July 1914, when they promised soldiers enlisting in World War I that they would be home by Christmas.

The working class cannot leave the ruling class in charge of combating the pandemic. The entire political establishment, including Labour and the Trades Union Congress, has rubberstamped the government's ending of the lockdown because they all serve the same financial and corporate oligarchy.

There is no time to lose. The Socialist Equality Party is calling for the formation of rank-and-file health and safety committees in every workplace to implement vital safety measures to save lives. This includes the temporary shutdown of all nonessential industry, and a ban on the full reopening of schools. All furloughed and unemployed workers must be paid a full wage. Key workers must be guaranteed a safe working environment, including full personal protective equipment, reduced shifts, and regular testing and contact tracing reports for every workplace. To finance these measures the major banks and corporations must be expropriated and placed under workers' control, as part of the fight for a workers' government and socialism.



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